The Etymology of the English Bread Name pita:

A Study in Jewish Intralinguistics

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In the Spring 1981 issue of American Speech someone asks for the origin of English pita (p. 71), which is listed in The Barnhart Dictionary of New English Since 1963, defined there as 'flat round barley or flour bread eaten in the Middle East', and unetymologized. The Barnhart Dictionary gives /'pi:ta:/ for English. There is also a more integrated English pronunciation, with sheva in the second syllable rather than /a:/.

The word is unrelated to the English phytonym pita or the English ornithonym pitta. It is not of Arabic origin either: the Arabic names for this bread are the mass noun ḫubz (which is only a referential name since this word is the generic for 'bread'), the somewhat formal count noun kmāǧi, the count noun raḏif (which actually means 'loaf'), and the count noun gursa (which designates a small pita). I have recorded all four words for Galilean Arabic, but do not know whether there are other words in other varieties of the language. Indeed, pita cannot be of Arabic origin since this language has no /p/. Proto-Semitic */p/ (and /p/ in older borrowings) has become /f/ in Arabic, and /p/ in more recent borrowings has become /b/, e.g., the Arabic placename nablus 'Shechem' goes back to Latin Neapolis (and is thus cognate with Italian Napoli 'Naples') and the more recent word bolis 'police'.

Synonyms of pita are pocket bread, pita pocket, pita bread, Arab bread, Syrian bread, and Arabic bread (I have heard or seen the first five of these terms in American English and Gila Persico reports the sixth for Toronto, Canada; in South African English, pita is used). These six synonyms are English innovations, there being no analogous terms in Arabic or any other language (though see below on French pain libanais). Pocket bread and pita pocket are based on the form of the bread. Pita bread illustrates a tendency, widespread in the world's languages, of using a generic to explain an otherwise opaque word. For example, English-origin Israeli Hebrew tayfun 'typhoon', monsun 'monsoon', poni 'pony' (horse), and bluz 'blues' often appear in the collocations sufat-tayfun (literally 'typhoon storm'), sufat-monsun, sus-poni (literally 'pony horse'), and musikat-bluz (literally 'blues music'); contrast the absence of English *typhoon storm, *monsoon storm and *blues music (the official Hebrew word for 'pony' is seyach, but sus-poni is common). Hebrew has kelev-buldog 'bulldog' (literally 'bulldog dog'), Italian as used in the United States has cana-buldogga 'bulldog' (literally 'bulldog dog'), and English has prosciutto ham (besides prosciutto), which is etymologically pleonastic too since Italian prosciutto means 'ham'. On the front page of a recent issue of The New York Times we find "the Huta Warszawa steel mill" (December 16, 1981, p. A1) -- since Polish huta means 'foundry', the phrase is literally 'Warsaw Foundry steel mill' if the Polish words are translated. Pleonastic kreplach dumplings appears in The New York Times of February 5, 1984. The pleonasm "Delek fuel corporation" (Hebrew delek means 'fuel') occurs in the New York Times Magazine of August 5, 1984, p. 60. The pleonasm "the Schuykill River" (kill means 'channel, stream, creek') is found on p. 156 of Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1964). There is a waterway on Staten

Island (New York) named Fresh Kills Creek. Another established pleonasm is Lake Tahoe (the name of a lake on the California-Nevada border): tah-oo means 'lake' in the local Amerindian language.

The Histadrut labor federation appears in The New York Times of June 13, 1984 (p. A7) [cf. Heb. histaderut 'federation'] and the Likud bloc (cf. Heb. likud 'bloc') is used regularly in The New York Timesand Newsweek (politically incorrect "the Likud coalition" appears in Newsday of July 8, 1984 [p. 17], New York of July 16, 1984 [p. 28], and New York Times Magazine of July 22, 1984 [p. 32]). Pleonastic the Gush Emunim group (gush is more or less 'group') appeared in The New York Times of June 19, 1984 (p. A9). On December 19, 1984, the pleonasm universitat em-ay-ti was heard on a Hebrew television program in Israel (if resolved, this becomes 'Massachusetts Institute of Technology University').

The tendency to add an explanatory word to unfamiliar names (tarot card, spinet piano) is condemned by Nickels (see "Generic Crutches" in Nickels 1974:52-53), but it is a natural one from the synchronic viewpoint. Indeed, when introducing a loan from the source language into the receptor language, translators are advised by at least one student of translatology to use a generic (see Larson 1975:108), e.g., the Jordan --> 'the Jordan River'). We see this in challah bread (New York, June 11, 1984, p. 6) and in the Gush Emunim movement (Newsweek, May 7, 1984, p. 67).

The antonomasiac use of Arab bread, Arabic bread, and Syrian bread stems from the bread's ethnic ties for certain English-speakers. In Arabic itself, 'Arab bread' and 'Syrian bread' are not used. Analogous examples are legion in the world's languages: in Turkish there is no 'Turkish coffee', 'Turkish delight', 'Turkish music' or 'Turkish towel'. Of the French equivalents of the following twenty-nine English lexemes, only the last two contain the word français(e): French bean, French berry, French boiler, French bread, French chalk, French cleaning, French cuff, French curve, French door, French drain, French dressing, French fries, French heel, French horn, French horsepower, French lavender, French leave, French letter, French loaf, French partridge, French plum, French polish, French roll, French telephone, French toast, French window, French wrestling, French roof (= French comble à la française), and French seam (= French couture à la française). To the last two examples one could add English French nail = French clou de Paris.

English has to take French leave but the French equivalent of this idiom refers to the English (filer à l'anglaise). Wentworth and Flexner 1960 list California kiss-off and Hollywood kiss-off for New York City and New York kiss-off for Los Angeles (all meaning 'dismissal [from one's job]' and used in the movie, television, radio, and advertising industries, as in to get the...). Similar examples with 'Russian', 'German', 'Spanish', 'Portuguese', etc. in several languages can be adduced. Dennis Baron has dubbed this linguistic phenomenon the grass-is-always-greener syndrome (Baron 1982:160).

Let us now turn to other languages.

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Pita is universal in contemporary Israeli Hebrew. It is both a mass and a count noun, e.g., achalti pita 'I had pita' and ten li shalosh pitot 'Give me three pitas' (see note 1). The first dictionary to list it (as far as I can tell) is Even-Shoshan 1951, where it is labelled "bilshon-hadibur" 'in the spoken language' and defined as 'ugat lechem shetucha haneefet bederech primitivit al gabey pach melohat keminhag beney adot-hamizrach' (i.e., 'flat bread baked in a primitive way on a very hot metal sheet as is customary among Eastern Jews'), with the illustrative sentence "hapalach achal pita vezetim"

('the fellah ate pita and olives'). Even-Shoshan's etymology is "al-pi haaramit: pita" ('after the Aramaic pita').

The foregoing entry can be improved: (a) it shows only final stress, but the universal stress in Israeli Hebrew is penultimate; (b) the word is found in all varieties of Israeli Hebrew, not just spoken ones; and (c) as we will see, the word is not from Aramaic or Aramic. Even-Shoshan removed the label "bilshon-hadibur" in his 1977 dictionary, but the two other infelicities remain and a new one has been added: it is true that before 1951 the bread was baked as Even-Shoshan writes, but by 1977 it was usually being prepared in bakeries, by modern methods, whereas (at least in Israel) only some Arabs, with traditional Arab ovens, were still following the old method.

Only a few other Hebrew dictionaries list pita: Sivan and Levenston (1965) gloss it as 'pitta, flat Arab bread'. It is pedantic to use tt (a transliteration of Hebrew dageshed taf) when the universal pronunciation in Hebrew and English is a single /t/. Alcalay 1971 has merely 'pat reduda, lechem shatuach' (that is, 'flat piece of bread, flat bread'), with the illustration "pita im falafel." Shechter 1962 has the English gloss 'pitah; flat bread'. Alcalay 1965 writes 'flat bread (loaf), Oriental loaf, pitah' (so too in the 1970 edition) and Abba writes 'flat Oriental bread' (Abba 1977). Sivan and Levenston's 1975 revision and abridgement of their 1965 dictionary has 'pitta, flat bread'. These glosses can be improved. Pita is not a loaf. General English Oriental refers to Eastern Asia, but in English as used in Israel it has become the conventional equivalent of Hebrew mizrachi in the sense of 'Western Asia'. Thus, when non-Israelis see Oriental restaurant or Oriental foods on signs in Israel, they should expect local Arab dishes and not Japanese, Chinese, Korean, etc. ones. Oriental may therefore be misleading to people not acquainted with English as used in Israel (it is interesting that the Orient is not used in the sense of 'Western Asia' or 'the Near East' in Israel). For want of a better word I have used Eastern above.

It is not clear whether Sivan and Levenston shortened 'flat Arab bread' (1965) to 'flat bread' (1975) to save space or because they later felt that the bread was being deethnified. In Israel today, it is felt to be a bread of Arab origin, though it is very widely eaten by Jews too. Flat bread, used by several dictionary-compilers, is not a name of the bread in Israel, though it is elsewhere (see the Addendum, below). Deethnification, incidentally, is now taking place in the United States. The 1971 quotation for pita in the Barnhart dictionary cited above is: "Now a smaller size is in vogue for sandwiches, and despite its ethnic overtones, Syrian bread, also called pita, shows every indication of becoming as American as pizza pie. Just witness the recent growth of Greek and Israeli sandwich stands."

Shechter's dictionary appeared nine years before the Barnhart's only citation for pita, yet this and other Hebrew-English dictionaries cannot be used to attest the word in non-Israeli varieties of English since they listed it only because it is used in English here. It is significant that not one of these Hebrew-English dictionaries having an English-Hebrew section lists (Eng.) pita (however spelled) in the latter. This illustrates one of the major faults of all two-way bilingual Hebrew dictionaries I have seen: the failure to reverse entries in order to equalize the two parts.2

Even-Shoshan's etymology of Hebrew pita is the "official" one. On July 1, 1981, Hadasa Shay of the Academy of the Hebrew Language wrote me that "pita is from Aramaic pita." As curious as it may sound, this phonological identity is only a coincidence. Here is why the "official" etymology is weak. Firstly, in contemporary formal and nonformal Israeli Hebrew, Aramic-origin words receive

final stress, e.g., girsa 'version', kursa 'armchair', harpatka 'adventure', and dugma 'example', yet pita does not. It is true that in nonformal varieties of today's Israeli Hebrew there are two exceptions (Aramic-origin mashkanta 'mortgage' and asmachta 'authority' are penultimately stressed [how can this be explained?]) and one could thus consider pita 'pocket bread' to be a third exception to the stress rule of formal Israeli Hebrew. However, the plurals of these words show that pita 'pocket bread' stands in a class by itself. In older Hebrew, the plural of girsa, etc. (including mashkanta and asmachta) was formed either by adding -ot or by replacing -a by -ot (i.e., girsaot, girsot); in contemporary Israeli Hebrew, only the longer variant is found (mashkantaot, etc.) and the /o/ is always stressed, even in nonformal varieties (and even in mashkantaot and asmachtaot). If pita were of Aramic origin, we would therefore expect to find older plurals *pitaot and *pitot and a contemporary plural *pitaot (finally stressed). However, the only occurring form is penultimately stressed pitot. Nor do we ever find pita 'pocket bread' pluralized as in Aramic, viz. *pitin (see Jastrow at pita).

Secondly, when Modern Hebrew borrows from Aramic, it is always writers or language-planners who do the borrowing, not the folk, for whom Aramic is generally an unknown language (like Latin or Classical Greek in the English-speaking world today). Israeli Hebrew pita is too folksy a word to be of Aramic origin (when Even-Shoshan wrote "bilshon-hadibur" he meant 'informal Hebrew' and not 'spoken Hebrew'). Aramic pita became the "official" etymology of Israeli Hebrew pita only because students of Hebrew did not see the panoply, as we will shortly, of semantically identical and phonologically identical or similar words in a not insignificant number of other languages used in the Balkans and Western Asia.

Mordecai Kosover recorded Land-of-Israel Yiddish "pite (pl. pites) = Arabic fitte 'bread, somewhat flat, eaten while fresh'. Its manner of baking differs between Bedouins and town people: it is thin, flat and drawn out by the former, while the latter bake it full and somewhat hard. As there is no p-sound in Arabic, we have to assume that pite originates rather in the Aramaic pita (= Hebrew pat) 'piece, bread'" (Kosover 1966:245).3 Although Kosover too looked mistakenly to Aramic, he did advance the discussion by adding Land-of-Israel Yiddish to the picture. I have been unable to attest his "fitte." In Israeli Arabic (at least today), the only similar word is fatte 'a dish consisting of bread dipped in milk or tea and fed to small children' (this is the sense in Galilean Arabic); 'a dish of bits of bread soaked in warm soup (made with chick peas, olive oil, lemon juice, chopped parsley, garlic, salt, and peppers)' (this is the sense in Jerusalem Arabic). Kosover's etymology, then, was "Land-of-Israel Yiddish < Aramic." How Hebrew fits into the picture is unclear (perhaps Kosover was unaware of the Israeli Hebrew word), but, in any case, his etymology is not correct.

Let us add a third language. Pita /'pita/ is universal in Southeastern Judezmo (= Judezmo as used in the Ottoman Empire and successor states). For Salonika Judezmo, the DJE has 'sorte de brioche faite de diverses couches de pâtes bien liées à leur contour et dont la couche supérieur lève, se gonfle et se boursoufle au four, en laissant entre elle et la couche immédiatement au-dessous un vide que l'on bourre parfois de haricots' (Nehama 1977, with further explanation, idioms, and the diminutive pitika, also with idioms). According to Sara Yontan-Musnik (b. Istanbul, 1954), (Turkish) pide / Judezmo pita in Istanbul now has a diameter of about thirty centimeters and is made of a bread-like dough; it consists of just one layer [only the two-layered variety could give rise to the name pocket bread] but is thicker than the Jewish variety

now made in Israel; in Turkey the bread is "decorated" by making square corrugations similar to those found on American waffles; Turkish Muslims bake it especially, but not only, during Ramadan (letter, June 21, 1981); see pita de ramazan in Nehama 1977.

Salonika Judezmo pita appears in Molho 1950 too (p. 355, where it is glossed 'especie de pan blando') and information on pita among Bosnian Sefaradim can be found in Camhy 1978:186-187 (where Nehama's definition is repeated but is taken from the manuscript, rather than the published version of his dictionary of Modern Salonika Judezmo; see p. 182, ft. 67). Crews recorded the diminutive pitika for Skoplje Judezmo (Crews 1935:145), adding "pitika. Turc pite (espèce de gâteau). pitikas se mangent la veille du sabbat (communication de M. Baruch)" (p. 263). No Turkish dictionary at hand lists *pite nor does Yontan-Musnik recognize it. In any case, we cannot get directly from the Judezmo diminutive to the Turkish word (pide) and, as we will see below, even the slightly less improbable derivation "Judezmo pita < Turkish pide" is not correct either. When Crews says that pitikas are eaten on the Eve of the Sabbath (Heb. erev-shabat), one should add "in Sarajevo" (Kalmi Baruch, whom she mentions, was from that city). In the absence of systematic fieldwork, we cannot tell how widespread this custom has been. More Judezmo attestations will be given below. Let us first continue broadening the canvas.

Turkish pide is glossed in various dictionaries as 'bread baked in soft flat cakes' or 'kind of bread baked in thin flat strips'.4 Pernot lists Greek pítta (Pernot, n.d.) and other Greek dictionaries give this variant as well as pita or pētta (see also pēta below). According to Şăineanu, pită 'bread' is used in Moldavian Rumanian and is of Serbian origin (Şăineanu 1936). Benson (1971) glosses SerboCroatian pîta by 'pita [type of pie made from thin layers of dough and a filling]', and Országh writes 'fruit, flan, pie, tart' at Hungarian pita / pite (Orszagh 1969). Bulgarian pita means 'flacher Laib (Brot, Kuchen, Käse, Wachs); Kuchen, Torte, Brot' according to Weigand 1913, where we also find pitulica 'Krapfel, Pfannkuchen'. A consultant for Albanian reports pitë to me. In a letter dated July 20, 1981, Hadasa Shay writes me that the files of the Academy of the Hebrew Language contain an undated article from the Hebrew periodical Mas'a (presumably from the 1950s) by Haim Blanc in which he recorded a similar-sounding word as being used by Armenian-speakers in Israel. If it is not more widespread than Israeli Armenian, it is a loan from the Land-of-Israel variety of one or more of the three Jewish languages being discussed here. If it is more widespread, it is probably of Greek or Turkish origin (depending on its form). Blanc, too, traced the Hebrew word to Aramic pita (he, like Kosover, presumably did so because he did not have all the data at hand). Shay wrote me that she had asked him whether he could date the clipping but he could not; it appeared in his series "Leshon Beney-Adam," which dealt with Hebrew usage (see JLR 3:206 in fine). Unfortunately, I have been unable to track it down.

Von Miklosisch gave Bulgarian pitice 'Krapfen', Rumanian pită, Turkish pita, Modern Greek pēta, and, in the sense of 'würdenträger am hofe der fürsten der Walachei', Old Slovenian pitar', which is strikingly reminiscent of Old English hlāfweard 'loafkeeper' (>> Eng. lord). Both the Old Slovenian and Old English words show the importance of bread in times gone by.5 Other leads to follow up can be found in Meyer-Lubke 1936:544 (no. 6546), Buck 1949, chap. 5, par. 52, no. 1 (p. 358), Rohlfs 1964:404f., Romeo 1962, Kahane 1962, and Alinei 1963-1964.6

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Our picture could probably be extended here and there, but it is already big enough for us to see that the "official" etymology of Hebrew pita is not

correct for another reason too: all the other data presented above cannot be linked to Aramic pita. Since this Aramic word does not appear in the Jewish Scriptures (= the Old Testament for Christians), Biblical influence on any of these non-Jewish languages is impossible. Pita does occur in the Talmud, but since non-Jews had access to it in only a few cases (= here and there a Christian clergyman or other scholar), Talmudic influence on non-Jewish speech is impossible too (and, in any case, it would be most unusual were the Talmud to be the source of a non-Jewish food name). Latter-day Hebrew, Yiddish, or Judezmo influence on these non-Jewish languages is out of the question too (except with respect to Israeli Hebrew influence on English, as we will see below). Rather, we should begin at the other end, that is, see the Jewish-language words as reflexes, not as possible etymons, of the non-Jewish-language words.

Of the three Jewish languages mentioned above as having a word meaning 'pita', Judezmo has had the longest and closest contact with the non-Jewish languages having a word for 'pita' (i.e., after the end of the fifteenth century, when Judezmophones began coming to the Ottoman Empire). Judezmo is thus the link between these non-Jewish languages, on one hand, and Land-of-Israel Yiddish and Hebrew on the other. We begin, then, with the origin of Judezmo pita.

Nehama's etymology (actually that of Jesús Cantera, his collaborator) is "portugais; et grec pitta." The presumed Portuguese word itself is not given. It cannot be the phytonym or ornithonym mentioned above. It is true that Meyer-Lübke supposed the existence of Port. *peta, but this is only a hypothetical form, which, moreover, has a different stressed vowel. Furthermore, the bread in question is eminently an Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan one, hence Judezmophones came to know it only in the Ottoman Empire, not on the Iberian Peninsula (or in Portugal).7 Greek will be taken up shortly.

No closer to the mark was Moshe Attias when he derived plural pitas (glossed as 'hoja de masa cocida encima de hojatada [sic] ardiente') from Arabic (Attias 1955:268). Writing in Israel, he knew that Jews here consider this to be an Arab bread, hence he assumed that this Judezmo word was of Arabic origin. However, we have already seen that Arabic is not (and cannot be) the source of any of these words. Armistead and Silverman (1962:80) could therefore have been more categorical in their rejection of this etymology: "phonology makes it difficult to derive pita(s) 'hojas de masa cocida encima de hojalata ardiente' from Arabic. Why seek farther than Modern Greek pita 'pie, cake'...?"

Max Leopold Wagner gave Bulgarian as the immediate source of our Southeastern Judezmo word: "Pita es palabra búlgara (que existe también en las otras lenguas balcánicas) y significa 'bollo'" (1950:24). Armistead and Silverman say merely that "Wagner... prefers Bulgarian pita 'idem' as the source" of the SEJ word, but, again, one should be more categorical: Bulgarian has influenced Judezmo only where the two languages have been coterritorial, hence, if Wagner were right, a Bulgarian word entering Judezmo should remain limited geographically. It could, theoretically, spread to varieties of Judezmo outside Bulgarian speech territory, but in light of the marginality of Bulgarian Judezmo (Gold 1983:77-78), this is most unlikely. Indeed, I know of no Judezmo words of Bulgarian origin used in varieties of Judezmo outside Bulgarian language territory except for the names of Bulgarian units of currency and of Bulgarian places. However, since names of coins, units of currency, and places travel freely, these numismonyms and toponyms are no proof of the nonmarginality of Bulgarian Judezmo within Southeastern Judezmo as a whole, just as the presence of the Vietnamese-origin numismonyms xu and dong in English, for example, does not constitute evidence for Vietnamese influence on English. At

most, therefore, Bulgarian reinforces Judezmo pita where the two languages have been coterritorial and, perhaps, influences its meaning.8

Edward Stankiewicz has written that Judezmo as used in Yugoslavia and SerboCroatian "show parallel semantic shifts; e.g., pita 'Saturday bread', pitika / Bitola pitulica 'dough stuffed with meat', and SerboCroatian pîta 'pastry' (generic) pitùlica 'a kind of stuffed dough' vs. Turkish pide / pitej, Greek pĕtta" (Stankiewicz 1964:23; see also Gold 1974).9 'Saturday bread' should be compared to remarks above about Crews' citation of Kalmi Baruch. Stankiewicz thus posits SerboCroatian semantic influence on Judezmo but does not etymologize the Judezmo word itself.

Armistead and Silverman have hit on the correct immediate etymon of the Judezmo word: Greek pit(t)a. The DJE is thus partly right too. Since a number of Judezmo words of immediate Greek origin are found throughout Southeastern Judezmo, diffusion of Jud. pita northwards, eastwards, and southwards into other varieties of Judezmo requires no explanation. Judezmo as used on Greek-speaking territory (unlike Judezmo on Bulgarian or SerboCroatian territory) has been a central variety: Salonika, once a city with a large Judezmophone population and a center of Jewish culture in Southeastern Sefarad 2, is called 'the little Jerusalem' in Judezmo. We are thus not surprised at the significant number of Greek-origin Judezmo words used outside Greek language territory or at their wide distribution in SEJ. The immediate etymon of our Judezmo word may have been Greek pita, pitta, or both; if the second, expected Judezmo reduction of the geminate consonant accounts for the single /t/ of pita. SerboCroatian pîta, Bulgarian pita, and Rumanian pită reinforce the word where Judezmo has been coterritorial with these languages. Turkish pide, on the other hand, does not, but any non-Jewish reflex of the Greek word may have influenced the Judezmo one semantically (or, expressed more realistically: non-Jewish culinary practice may have influenced Jewish practice, with a corresponding change in the meaning of Judezmo pita). We are now a step closer to American English.

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Judezmo and Yiddish have been everyday spoken and written languages in the Land of Israel since the fifteenth century, whereas Hebrew acquired this status in modern times only in the last hundred years or so. Land-of-Israel Judezmo influence on Land-of-Israel Yiddish is well attested (Kosover 1966:351-357 and passim). And we have seen that Kosover lists pite for this variety of Yiddish. Land-of-Israel Judezmo pita is therefore the immediate source of Land-of-Israel Yiddish pite. This Yiddish word shows characteristic Yiddish weakening of a syllable-final unstressed vowel to sheva (romanized here as e). See, for example, Polish błoto 'mud' > Yid. blote, Ashkenazic Hebrew simcho 'joy' > Yid. simkhe, and German Warschau 'Warsaw' > Yid. varshe.

Although Turkish was the official language of the Land of Israel from 1516 to 1917, this language is irrelevant to the Land-of-Israel variety of any of our three Jewish languages because Turk. pide would have given a form with /d/. Nor can we assume that the Judezmo word is a borrowing from Land-of-Israel Yiddish (which is the only variety of Yiddish to have such a word): Land-of-Israel Yiddish could, at most, have influenced Land-of-Israel Judezmo but not all of Southeastern Judezmo (there is no reason to doubt that pita is universal in SEJ). Moreover, if we assumed that the Judezmo word is of Yiddish origin, there would be no plausible etymology for the Yiddish word inasmuch as Yiddish has had no significant contact with Greek, Bulgarian, SerboCroatian, or Albanian. We would therefore have to assume "Rumanian > Yiddish as used in Rumania > Judezmo as used in Rumania >...." or "Rumanian > Yiddish as used in Rumania > Land-of-Israel Yiddish > Land-of-Israel Judezmo > other varieties of SEJ," but all of this would be far-fetched.

Pita (in our sense) is new in Hebrew. I have oral evidence for it from the 1940s. Even-Shoshan 1951, as has been mentioned, is the first dictionary to list it and the oldest written primary source I have is Attias 1955:150. The word is probably older than the 1940s, though no older than the beginnings of Israeli Hebrew itself (i.e. presumably no earlier than 1882); it is also possible that one or more of the Arabic words were once used in Hebrew, though I have no evidence for this. The Judezmo and Yiddish words go back no further than the sixteenth century (but I do not know exactly how old they are; see below on Steinmetz's note). This much is certain: Land-of-Israel Yiddish pite is of immediate Land-of-Israel Judezmo origin and SEJ pita is of immediate Greek origin. What we have to determine now is how the word entered Hebrew. At first blush, it would seem that the Hebrew word (like the Yiddish one) is an immediate reflex of Judezmo pita inasmuch as Heb. pita < Jud. pita appears phonologically more plausible (i.e. x < x) than Heb. pita < Yid. pite (i.e., x < X). Yet the derivation which involves the least phonological change is not necessarily the historically correct one (see Gold 1981a:55-56 for an example concerning the three languages being dealt with here; see also the rejection of "Hebrew pita < Aramic pita" above). Outer history must be considered too.

Since Modern Hebrew emerged and developed in a largely Yiddish and overwhelmingly Ashkenazic milieu, the Hebrew word could be of immediate Land-of-Israel Yiddish origin (whether exclusively or in addition to being of immediate Southeastern Judezmo origin): since Hebrew does not have sheva in this position, Yiddish -e (i.e. sheva) would have been hebraized as -a (thus, Eastern Yiddish male hypocoristics like shayke and mote become shayka and mota in Israeli Hebrew; American English pizza [which has sheva] becomes pitsa in Israeli Hebrew; etc.). Therefore, because of circumstantial evidence (the influence which Yiddish, including Land-of-Israel Yiddish, has had on Israeli Hebrew), at least one immediate source of Hebrew pita is Land-of-Israel Yiddish.

That Southeastern Judezmo (and not only Land-of-Israel Judezmo) is an immediate source of our Hebrew word is clear from the informal Israeli Hebrew idiom asa mimenu [mimena, etc.] pita, which is glossed by Ben-Amots and Ben-Yehuda (1976) as 'gavar alav bekalut, nitseach oto, asa mimenu tsechok, hika oto' (i.e., 'to overpower him easily, defeat him, make a fool of him, beat him'), with the sample sentence "keshhitsia lehafsik et hapetsatsot beorach chad-tsedadi, asu mimenu pita bemerkaz haavoda" 'when he suggested a unilateral halt to the bombings, they "made pita out of him" in the Labor Party's National Council'. As far as I have been able to determine, there is no analogous Land-of-Israel Yiddish idiom (with pite that is) but Salonika Judezmo (and probably other varieties of SEJ) does have the idiom fazer a uno pita (literally 'to make someone into pita'), which the DJE defines as 'battre quelqu'un avec cruauté; faire subir à quelqu'un une grave humiliation publique'. This Salonika Judezmo (general SEJ?) idiom is the source of the Israeli Hebrew one (both have the same meaning and almost exactly the same structure [Hebrew has 'of him' whereas Judezmo has 'him', which is an inconsequential difference]). Consequently, Salonika Judezmo (SEJ?) is another immediate source of Israel Hebrew pita itself too.10

Pita is used in still other ways in Israeli Hebrew: a certain kind of Syrian military position is called a pita surit (literally 'Syrian pita'). A 'characterless face' or 'flat face' is a partsuf-pita (literally 'pita mug') and a person with the brains of a dodo is said to have sechel shel pita (e.g., yesh lo sechel shel pita). Partsuf-pita and sechel shel pita (which were reported to

me by Miriam Busel) are based on the fact that pita as made in Israel today has no decorations (contrast the way it is made in Turkey) and is thus "characterless" and extremely simple. Busel also reports mi tala po pita?, which is used to avoid replying to a question. It is said fast and thus sounds like nonsense, hence is used to try to disconcert a person seeking an answer to a question. The literal meaning of this Hebrew expression is 'Who hung up pita here?', which of course makes no sense.

From Hebrew, pita has entered other languages used by Jews in Israel (Russian, Spanish, etc.).11

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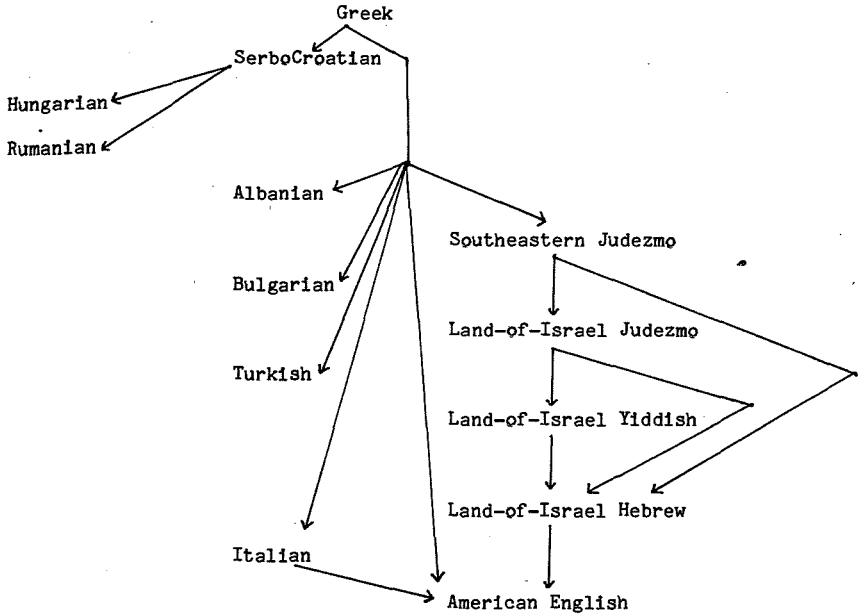
Most of the missing links have now been found: Greek > Southeastern Judezmo (with diffusion to Land-of-Israel Judezmo, whence to Land-of-Israel Yiddish, whence to Israeli Hebrew; also, Southeastern Judezmo [including Land-of-Israel Judezmo] > Israeli Hebrew). For anglophone Jews who are of Judezmo, Greek, Rumanian, Bulgarian, SerboCroatian, etc. background but who have not been influenced by Israeli Hebrew (whether directly or indirectly), the immediate source of this English word (if they know it) is one of these languages. Likewise, for non-Jewish anglophones of Greek, Rumanian, Bulgarian, etc. background who are uninfluenced by Israeli Hebrew in one way or another, the word is of corresponding origin. For anglophones of Calabrian or Southern Apulian background, this English word (again, if they are uninfluenced by any other relevant language) is a reflex of Italian pitta (Romeo 1962:25), which is cognate with Neapolitan Italian pizza (> American English pizza 'pizza') > Israeli Hebrw pitsa 'pizza' > Israeli Arabic bisa 'pizza').12

However, when we are speaking of English pita as a word being brought to the attention of the average anglophone, as a word which is appearing in general English dictionaries, minor varieties like the English of people of Rumanian or Bulgarian background are irrelevant. Quite to the contrary — those popularizing the bread beyond ethnic borders (in the United States at least) have been Italians, Greeks, and Israelis (see the Barnhart quotation), that is, Italian-, Greek-, and Hebrew-speakers and their descendants (it is most unlikely that among Israelis in American fast-food eateries selling pita there are speakers of Judezmo or of Land-of-Israel Yiddish). Since Greeks preceded Israelis in the American fast-food business (I estimate that the latter were not conspicuous before around 1960), Greek influence is prior. Since large-scale Greek emigration began after large-scale Italian emigration to the United States, we can add a chronological dimension to our etymology by saying that pita was brought into English by three successive groups of people (Italian-, Greek-, and Hebrew-speakers, in that order). What the role of Arabic-speakers has been remains to be investigated (the terms Arab bread, Arabic bread, and Syrian bread point to their having helped popularize pita, but they seem to have had no linguistic influence). Table 1 summarizes the etymological history of English pita.

Table 1. The Etymology English pita 'pocket bread'



Note: Land-of-Israel Judezmo is a variety of Southeastern Judezmo, not a separate language. Several languages have reinforced the Judezmo word and several non-Jewish cultures have influenced Jews' preparation and use of pita. Not being certain of settlement history in English-speaking areas other than the United States, I have given only American English in the above table.

We have now seen enough of the family portrait (there may be a few distant relatives lurking on the edges) to understand that Aramic pita could not sire such a large non-Jewish progeny. As has already been noted, an obscure Talmudic word could not have been picked up by so many non-Jews nor could it have entered non-Jewish languages from Southeastern Judezmo or from Land-of-Israel Yiddish; the only instance of non-Jewish borrowing of a Jewish form is American English pita < Israeli Hebrew pita (but even here one hastens to add that Italian and Greek supplied the word earlier). From the linguistic data, then, one sees that Jews learned to eat pita from other Jews (= speakers of Israeli Hebrew from speakers of Land-of-Israel Judezmo and Land-of-Israel Yiddish; speakers of Land-of-Israel Yiddish from speakers of Land-of-Israel Judezmo) and Jews learned to eat it from non-Jews (= speakers of Southeastern Judezmo from various coterritorial non-Jews, initially Greeks). What the linguistic data do not reflect is that among Jews in Israel today pita is considered to be an Arab (not a Sefardic or Ashkenazic) bread and that certain Jews in the Land of Israel learned to eat it from non-Jews.

Cultural and culinary studies should accompany a thorough investigation of pita's history (see Vidossi 1966, p. 297, no. 23 for some information in this regard; in the summer of 1980 I saw hamburgers being sold in pita pockets in New York City, which is an innovation from the viewpoint of Arab and Jewish cuisine). Sometimes the immediate origin of a definiens parallels its users' perception of the immediate origin of the corresponding definiendum and sometimes it does not. For example, although now increasingly deethnicized, pastrami was once considered an Eastern Ashkenazic meat in the United States among many segments of the population which knew it and this matches the immediate origin of English pastrami, namely Eastern Yiddish pastrame.13 Jews in Eastern Ashkenaz have considered it to be typical of Rumanian Jews and, again, the linguistic and cultural facts coincide: pastrame is first recorded for Yiddish on Rumanian-language territory. Jews there have seen it as an originally Rumanian meat and again there is a linguistic-cultural coincidence: Yiddish pastrame is an immediate reflex of Rum. pastramă. Although this had been forgotten in the twentieth century if not earlier, Rumanians learned how to make pastrami from the Turks and, indeed, the immediate etymon of this Rumanian word is Turkish pastirma (some Rumanian etymologists, who want to emphasize the Romance character of the language and deemphasize its "Oriental" elements, have tried to trace this Rumanian word to Latin; details will be given in Gold ms.). Greek too has a reflex of the Turkish word: it is basterma, which refers to spicy dried beef (often goat meat) coated with a peppered layer and is somewhat like American pastrami. Turkish pastirma is similar to Greek basterma except that it is often made of camel meat.

Or, in Israel, pizza is considered either an Italian or American food by Jews and a local Jewish food by most Arabs (only some Arabs consider it to be Italian, namely those with a certain degree of Western education). Hebrew pitsa is indeed an immediate reflex of Eng. pizza and Israeli Arabic bisa is a reflex of Israeli Hebrew pitsa (if certain Israeli Jews consider pizza to be Italian rather than American, it is because (like certain Western-educated Arabs) they have special nonsynchronic knowledge: pizza, along with Italian restaurants, was introduced from the United States and not from Italy). In the United States, though no longer a narrowly ethnic food, pizza is still identified with Italians, a perception which is matched by language history (Eng. pizza is of immediate Italian origin).14

The history of pita, however, illustrates an imperfect match. In the United States, this bread is generally considered to be Arab or Middle Eastern (cf. the names Arab bread, Arabic bread, and Syrian bread. English pita, however, is not of Arabic origin. On the other hand, the fact that this word is of immediate Greek and Hebrew origin harmonizes, in a vague way, with the perception of this bread as "Middle Eastern." As for Italian, probably only elderly Italians (see note 12) now know that English pita is also of immediate Italian origin or that this is an Italian bread too. Yontan-Musnik tells me that in Turkey pita is regarded as a Greek-origin bread by both Jews and non-Jews. This matches etymology since the Judezmo and Turkish words are of immediate Greek origin. Among Israeli Jews today, pita is considered to be of local Arab origin and here the linguistic and cultural facts are thus in complete disaccord: not one of the Arabic words has been borrowed by Hebrew-speakers and Hebrew pita is not of Arabic origin.

Among Israeli Arabs today, the bread is considered to be native and this matches, at least partly, the linguistic facts: three of the Arabic names given above are based on native roots and are native Arabic coinages; only kmāǧi has another origin: it is from Osmanli Turkish and Persian kumāǧ.

With respect to cuisine, we have seen that Greek pit(t)a and reflexes have been defined in a number of ways and that the bread is used in various ways.15 The diameter of regular pita baked by Jews in Israel is now usually about fifteen centimeters and that baked by Arabs about twenty (but the qursa is smaller). However, some Jews also bake what is called pita irakit (literally 'Iraqi pita') in Hebrew; it is larger, thinner, and does not form a pocket (so that it must be rolled around whatever filling it contains). It was brought to Israel by Iraqi Jews. There is also (Heb.) pita temanit 'Yemenite pita', which was brought here by Yemenite Jews; it is made with vegetable oil; in Yemenite Yahudic it is called mlawaḥ (initially stressed); this Yemenite Yahudic word is used in Hebrew too, hence 'Yemenite pita' has two names in Hebrew. Jewish pita which is not pita irakit or pita temanit is called simply pita (i.e., that which is about fifteen centimeters in diameter) in Hebrew but if one wants to contrast the two, one calls the latter pita regila 'regular pita' (e.g., ten li pita irakit, lo pita regila); cf. my use of regular pita above. There is also (Heb.) pita druzit 'Druze pita', which is very big and very thin' (in Arabic it is called ḫubz saǯ). Pita regila is also used in contrast to this kind of pita.

Jews use cornflour to make regular pita (cornflour gives it a lighter color) and Arabs wheat (which gives it a darker color). Both bake it double-layered, like a closed, round pocket. Regular Jewish pita is thicker than Arab pita. Regular Jewish pita used to be larger here, but in recent years, like American chocolate bars, ice-cream pops and much else, it has gotten smaller... and more expensive.

Addendum

After the foregoing was written, the third volume of the new supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary appeared (1982). Rather than rewrite the article in the light of the new data which this supplement contains, I decided to leave it as is and see whether the new information supported or contradicted the conclusions reached above. Some other new sources will be discussed now too.

The headword in OEDS's entry is pita, "also peeta, pitah, pitta." This is correct since pita has now become the most frequent spelling and is in accord with the General-Purpose Romanization of the American National Romanization of Hebrew. The definition is 'a thick flat bread of the kind common in Mediterranean and Arab countries; usually cut open and filled with a meat or other filling'. That the word may be attributive (cf., e.g., pita bread) is noted too.

OEDS has thirteen citations and I have tried to identify the ethnic context in which the word occurs: 1951 (Israeli / Jewish), 1963 (Israeli / Jewish), 1964 (Greek), 1965 ("Balkan"), 1967 (the context is unclear from the citation), 1970 (Greek), 1971 (Arab), 1974 (Greek), 1975 (Israeli / Jewish), 1976 (Israeli / Jewish), 1977 (Arab), 1978 (Greek), 1979 (presumably Greek). It is interesting that no Italian contexts were noted and that the oldest citation in OEDS is only from 1951 (Mastria's testimony [see note 12] shows that Italians of Calabrian or Southern Apulian background were using pitta in English before World War I). OED and OEDS being based only on written sources, it is not surprising that its first citation is so late (on the growing realization among lexicographers that written materials are not the only source of linguistic information see Clark 1980-1981).

Aside from two citations with an Arab context, one with a "Balkan" context, and one with an unclear context, all the citations refer either to Greece or Jewish Israel. This agrees with the conclusions reached above about the

latter-day transmission of the word to English (were there earlier citations in OEDS, they would presumably show an Italian context). Interestingly, though two citations show Arab contexts, Arab bread, Arabic bread, and Syrian bread are not listed in OEDS. Furthermore, if we may rely on OEDS, none of the Arabic names for pita has been borrowed by English (except perhaps the English of Arabic-speakers).

OEDS's etymology is "adaptation of Modern Greek petta / pit(t)a [my romanizations, D. L. G.] 'bread, cake, pie', perhaps from Greek.... Cf. Turkish pide, Hebrew pittah." One infers from this etymology that the person who wrote it looked at the citations (most show a Greek or Israeli Jewish context, two an Arab context, and one a "Balkan" context) and on the basis of these contexts then turned to Greek and Hebrew (cf. the mention of these two languages) for etymons, to Arabic (but found nothing), and to "Balkan" languages (finding Turkish pide). It is here where my conclusions and OEDS's differ: Greek is correctly given as an immediate source, but Israeli Hebrew has been slighted by being relegated to a virtual footnote ("Cf."). Conversely, Turkish pide is only a cognate and should not figure here at all (unless the entire family portrait is given). Italian, as may be expected from the absence of citations showing an Italian context, does not appear in OEDS's etymology at all. OEDS does not attempt to relate the Greek, Hebrew, and Turkish words. One would also like the chronology of borrowing to be shown: 1. Calabrian and Southern Apulian Italian, 2. Greek, 3. Israeli Hebrew.

Two notes on pita have appeared in America Speech 56, 4, Winter 1981. Sol Steinmetz writes (p. 268) that the English word comes "from Hebrew pīta (from Aramaic) 'piece of bread'. It is round and flat like a pancake but hollow inside so that when it is sliced open it resembles a pocket (hence pocket bread). Israelis popularized it in this country, using it for felafel, which is fried peas, onions, and spices stuffed into the sliced pita. It has been the usual bread of the Middle East since ancient times and is baked in various sizes. In this country it comes in a size slightly larger than a roll and is often sold in cellophane-wrapped six-packs at the friendly neighborhood supermarket." This characterization can be improved: Israeli Hebrew pita is only one of the immediate etymons of English pita; there is no need for the macron on the i since Israeli Hebrew does not have phonemic vowel length; the Hebrew word is not of Aramaic (or Aramic) origin (Steinmetz has uncritically accepted the "official" etymology); the Hebrew word does not mean 'piece of bread' (it means 'pita bread'); and Israelis have been only one group of popularizers of this bread in English-speaking countries. It would be good to know on what basis Steinmetz writes "ancient times."

On the same page, Robert Ness writes that he has also heard flat bread and Lebanese bread, "both of which are common in England and West Africa. The word pita or pitta is the Greek word for 'pie' or 'flat cake' (pétta, variant pitta) as in tiropitta 'cheese pie', spanikopitta 'spinach pie', and melopitta 'honeycomb'. The word has perhaps come into English through the growing popularity in the United States of the Greek souvlaki, that ubiquitous Athenian street-corner snack which consists of small chinks of beef or lamb wrapped in a pitta with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and yogurt-garlic sauce and now sold at many Greek take-outs in New York City and doubtless elsewhere." Ness, too, has seen part of the picture (there is no attempt in this issue of American Speech to harmonize his and Steinmetz's views). I assume that Lebanese bread is a translation of French pain libanais 'pita bread'.

In American Speech 56, 3, Fall 1981, Charles Clay Doyle writes that he heard bible bread 'pita bread' in southern California in the early 1970s (p. 189). He does not explain the origin of the term, but I venture this guess: the name was coined by a Christian pilgrim to Israel who saw the bread here and imagined, perhaps half-jokingly, that it goes back to Biblical times.

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1963) has pita 'a thin flat bread'. It adopts OEDS's etymology ("New Greek, literally 'pie, cake'"). As noted above, this is only one of the immediate etymons of the English word.

As far as I can tell, the earliest etymology proposed for English pita is found in Gold 1981b: "A few culinary items (falafel, chumus, techina, and pita), also from Israeli Hebrew, are now being popularized by Israeli restauranters in the United States" (p. 477). Italian and Greek should have been mentioned here too. Also, it is not only restauranters (but people in the fast-food business too) who are popularizing the word.

Notes

1. English pita is both a mass and a count noun ("We had pita," "Give me three pitas"). Plural pitas is pronounced with [z]. From Hebrew-speakers one also hears the plural pitot in English (see note 11).

2. As a rule, compilers of Hebrew bilingual dictionaries (for instance, Hebrew and French, Hebrew and English, and Hebrew and German dictionaries) use a monolingual non-Hebrew dictionary (i.e., a French, English, or German dictionary) as their corpus for the non-Hebrew--Hebrew section and a monolingual Hebrew dictionary for the Hebrew--non-Hebrew section. Sivan and Levenston 1965, for example, is merely a reworking of one of Even-Shoshan's dictionaries, with some additions (but also with pious transfer of some of Even-Shoshan's errors). Since these compilers fail to equalize the two sections by reversing, items appearing as entries in one section do not always appear, as they should, as glosses in the other section. Thus, pita 'pita (bread)' in the Hebrew-English section of a Hebrew and English dictionary should be reversed to pita (bread) 'pita' in the English-Hebrew section. Since pita was recorded in Hebrew dictionaries earlier than in English dictionaries and since compilers of two-way Hebrew bilingual dictionaries fail to reverse, it is understandable (but unpardonable) that pita appears in the Hebrew-English section of Sivan and Levenston's works but is absent in the English-Hebrew section.

3. "Aramic pita > Land-of-Israel Yiddish pite" or "Aramic pita 'bread' > Israeli Hebrew pita 'pocket bread'" would thus show specialization of meaning (this is precisely what has happened with Arabic ḫubz). However, whereas such a semantic shift is not surprising in the case of Arabic (since pita is the Arab bread [at least in Israel if not elsewhere too]), it is far from being the only bread eaten by Jews here.

4. Turkish vowel harmony explains the -e of pide, i.e., /i/ (a high front vowel) causes fronting and raising of /a/ to /e/. I cannot explain Turkish /d/, but Sara Yontan-Musnik, a native speaker of this language, tells me that "although /t/ would be possible here, /d/ sounds more Turkish." She adds that Stankiewicz's "pitej," Miklosisch's "pita," and Crews' "pite" do not exist, at least not in twentieth-century Turkish.

5. The earliest citation I have for Rumanian pită is from 1559. In that year, a Protestant catechism, containing the Lord's Prayer, was printed (in Cyrillic letters) in Braşov. The catechism had been translated from Hungarian and for 'our bread' the translator wrote pită noastră. The entire Lord's Prayer in this catechism can be seen in Tagliavini 1952:477 and Elcock 1960:484. Elcock's gloss is 'a kind of coarse bread' and he says that Rumanian pita is of Slavic

origin (contrast Şăineanu's more precise derivation). How can one reconcile Şăineanu's characterization of this word as Moldavian Rumanian and the fact that Braşov is not in Moldavia? Was the translator from Moldavia? Did isoglosses shift between 1559 and Şăineanu's times?

6. Sandfeld discusses the spread of Greek pitta in Balkan languages but, curiously, not in the sense which interests us here (Sandfeld 1930:36).

7. The etymologies are one of the weakest aspects of Nehama 1977 (see JLR 1:49 and JLR 3:117-155 for more examples).

8. Wagner derived the Judezmo verb apitar from Bulgarian and SerboCroatian pîta (p. 27), but it is from the Judezmo noun pita.

9. Stankiewicz's Bitola Judezmo pitulica is the recent form; the older Bitola Judezmo form is pitulice and it can be found (in the romanization pitulitse) in Luria 1930:86, 233. According to the index verborum (p. 249) it is also found in section 180 (p. 236) of Luria's book, but it is not. If Judezmo pitulica or pitulice is found in Bulgaria, it is from Bulgarian pitulica (see Weigand 1913). The /c/ in these Bitola forms tells us that they are not old borrowings. If they were, we would have /s/ instead of /c/ (cf. the Judezmo treatment of the Hebrew letter tsadi).

10. All Hebrew dictionaries listing pita 'pocket bread' spell it with a taf, thus relating it to Aramic pita (which has a taf too). This spelling is based on nothing more than the "official" etymology and should not be taken as support for it. In Judezmo, the word is spelled with a tet and this should be its Hebrew spelling too. Israeli Hebrew pita 'pocket bread' is not of immediate Rumanian, SerboCroatian, Greek, Bulgarian, etc. origin since contact between any of these languages and Hebrew has been weak (or at least speakers of these languages have not been linguistically influential in Hebrew circles); Judezmo and (especially) Yiddish influence on Israeli Hebrew, on the other hand, is easy to exemplify.

Adolfo Arditti (a native speaker of Saloniķa Judezmo) writes me that the DJE's use of uno in the canonic form of various idioms in this dictionary is not found in Judezmo; I assume that it was introduced by Jesús Cantera (a native speaker of Spanish), who collaborated with Joseph Nehama in the preparation of this dictionary (dummy uno is used in Spanish when giving the canonic form of idioms, hence the presumption is that Cantera was influenced by his native language here). Judezmo lacks a firm lexicographical tradition and has no standard way of citing idioms, but Arditti suggests that una presona 'a person' would be better, hence fazer auna presona pita instead of "fazer a uno pita."

11. The English plural, pitas (see note 1), is an innovation, not a reflex of Jud. pl. pitas or Yid. pl. pites (because Eng. -s here is pronounced /z/ whereas Jud. and Yid. -s is not -- for the Judezmo pronunciation, see Yontan-Musnik's comment on z in JLR 3:9, note 17; the Yiddish pronunciation is a fully voiceless [s]). The Hebrew and Judezmo plurals are innovations too, each with respect to that language's immediate source.

12. The following letter to the editor appeared on page 8 of the New York Sunday News Magazine of September 19, 1982: "I don't know where you got your silly information (For Pita's Sake by Ruth Spear, July 25). You say that pita bread was brought here during the '30s by the people of the Middle East. Well, I'm 72 years old and when I was five, I used to go to the Italian bakery for pita as my mother would make sandwiches for the working members of our family. Only my mother could not speak a word of English (she came from Italy when I was two) and she would call it bita. Joseph W. Mastria, Jersey City."

I wrote to Mastria asking where his mother was from and whether she indeed pronounced the word with /b/. His reply (dated November 20, 1982) was that both his parents were born in Calabria and "I don't remember how my mother pronounced it. It probably was pitta. I just put pita as a guess." Bita in the printed version of Mastria's letter to the News, then, seems to be a misprint. At any rate, his mother's use of the word (pitta one assumes) is evidence for its presence in late-nineteenth-century Calabrian Italian (I had earlier recorded it for Calabria of the 1920s from Antonio Chiarella), though it must be older. Though his mother knew no English, we may assume that Italian-English bilinguals who knew the Italian word pitta used it when speaking English too. According to a letter from Rhoda Gold (dated October 5, 1982), Italian pita bread which was then being sold in New York City looked like an oversized donut; it had a hole in the middle but was not pocket-shaped. Spear's article is unavailable in any Israeli library. Romeo 1962, Kahane 1962, and Alinei 1963-1964 treat this Italian word.

13. Eastern Yiddish word-final sheva going to /i/ in American Eastern Ashkenazic English is found in bobi 'grandmother', zeydi 'grandfather', rebi 'Chasidic leader', Itshi (male hypocoristic), Kivi (male hypocoristic), Shuli (female given name; also spelled Shuly), shpilki (in the idiom to be sitting on shpilkis 'to be on pins and needles') < Eastern Yiddish bobe, zeyde, rebe, itshe, kive, shule, shpilke (see R641/1 in JLR 3:361 and R907/1 in JLR 3:374). English pastrami < Eastern Yiddish pastrame is thus another example. However, this change does not take place in all words (e.g., English khutspe). I have been unable to determine what happens to Rumanian word-final sheva in the English of descendants of Rumanian speakers. The phenomenon of sheva > /i/ word-finally has also been recorded for Missouri English (see the review of Otto Jespersen's Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin in JLR 5). See also the replies to Q641 in the JLR.

14. Since Neapolitan Italian pizza 'pizza' and Calabrian / Southern Apulian pitta (breadname) are cognates, Israeli Hebrew pita 'pita bread' and Israeli Hebrew pitsa 'pizza' are distant cognates.

15. Benson's pita in the English gloss of his SerboCroatian dictionary is not to be taken in the sense of 'pocket bread'. I have adopted his spelling SerboCroatian (suggested to him by his wife) because it is symbolic of the unity of Serbian and Croatian (hence the absence of a hyphen) yet also of the fact that there are differences between the two (hence the midword capital letter).

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"Gentlemen, We Know More Yiddish Than We Admit"

(On Werner Weinberg's Die Reste des Jüdischdeutschen)

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[Werner Weinberg, Die Reste des Jüdischdeutschen, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1969]

For several decades Yiddish linguists have held that the history of the language is, in brief, as follows: Jews from France and Italy, speaking Zarphatic and Italkian respectively (and having Hebrew-Aramic as their archistratal language), starting settling in significant numbers on German-speaking territory about a thousand years ago. They began learning German in order to be able to communicate with the local non-Jewish population but never learned or used it in such a way that their speech was indistinguishable from that of the non-Jewish population (see the review of the book edited by Richard W. Bailey and Jay L. Robinson in this volume of the JLR). Eventually, this newly acquired language (used at first only for communication with non-Jews) began to be used for intra-Jewish communication too (could one of the reasons have been that Zarphatic and Italkian may not have been mutually intelligible, hence an interlanguage was needed?), so much so that Zarphatic and Italkian were eventually forgotten by this community, though vestiges of these two languages remain in Yiddish to this day (and from the fact that there are more Zarphatic- than Italkian-origin items in contemporary Yiddish one may perhaps be able to conclude that early Ashkenazic Jewry was more of French than Italian origin).

Thus, from the very beginnings of the Ashkenazic community, its "German" was different from the German of non-Jews. When Ashkenazim began moving onto Slavic territory, they came into contact with an already established Jewish community there, which was speaking one or more Slavic languages (= Knaanic Jews). Knaanic Jewry was eventually completely absorbed by Ashkenazic Jewry, though a number of Knaanic words entered Yiddish and they are, in fact, the only vestige left today of this now vanished branch of Jewry.

The Jewish Enlightenment, at first under the leadership of Moses Mendelssohn, opposed the use of a lect which by the second half of the eighteenth century had become quite different from the German of non-Jews and it called, instead, for "pure German." Thus, whereas the "German" (i.e., Yiddish) of Jews had until the second half of the eighteenth century developed on its own (without conscious intervention), Mendelssohn and his followers wanted to engineer a shift to another lect. This process has continued among "German"-speaking Jews into the twentieth century, as their speech and writing came ever closer to that of non-Jews. However, as in many instances of language shift, the lect being abandoned has left traces in the lect being adopted (cf. the replacement of Zarphatic, Italkian, Knaanic by Yiddish) and, furthermore, the shift has not been taking place at the same rate in different places or for different segments of the population (see below on the several channels along which the shift has been taking place). The change has thus been from Yiddish